

Testimony in Support of Raised Bill 6590, An Act Concerning Certain Protections for Group and Family Child Care Homes.

February 6, 2023

Good Afternoon Senator Moore, Representative Luxenberg, Ranking members Senator Sampson, Representative Scott and Esteemed Members of the Housing Committee,

My name is Liz Fraser and I am the Policy Director for The Connecticut Association for Human Services, a division of Advancing Connecticut Together, ACT.

I am here today in support of Raised Bill 6590 An Act Concerning Certain Protections for Group and Family Child Care Homes. If passed this legislation will equalize and streamline the local permitting process for family home child care providers, providing greater access to child care across our state, and added opportunity for entrepreneurs to grow small businesses.

Ensuring a strong family child system of care is an economic issue. Licensed home care providers are small business owners. Many are black and brown women. Their services contribute to the economy thrice: they provide for families to work with peace of mind knowing their children are in good care; they provide a strong and nurturing environment for the children which leads to their healthy development; and owners are able to provide for *their own* family, while adding to their community's economic and cultural context.

In terms of child care, Connecticut is in a difficult situation. Like most other states, Connecticut is in the midst of an early care and education crisis; early care and education is unaffordable for most families, and it is not available in many parts of the state. Meanwhile, for the majority of providers, parent fees, state funding, and Care4Kids subsidies do not bring in enough revenue to adequately compensate their early educators. Many centers have closed classrooms because they can't find early educators to fill position.

Pre-pandemic, Connecticut was already experiencing a shortage of accessible infant and toddler care. At present, it is estimated to be available for only one out of every three children. Additionally, 44% of *all* young children still live in a childcare desert¹, leaving many families with little or no access to early care, limiting their ability to work. A recent survey conducted by CAHS estimates that about 22,000 children may not be receiving care in a licensed facility due to the staffing shortages.²

For thirty years Connecticut law has allowed residents the ability to provide licensed child care in their home. The smaller, more intimate family environment attracts many of the families who choose home-based care for their children, especially for babies. In fact, across the state home based

¹ https://americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Connecticut.pdf?_ga=2.197237225.731845872.1657716085-1829753127.1639495680

² Survey conducted by the Connecticut Association for Human Services, November, 2022. Data available upon request

care provides much of the infrastructure for infants and toddlers. It offers a homey setting for the children and is convenient for parents; providers can be more flexible with fluctuating parent work schedules, including providing care during non-traditional hours. Often parents can find family providers closer to home, without the need for extended transportation.

However, due to some locally restrictive permitting processes, many home-based providers are finding it increasingly difficult to open, expand or run their businesses. In some localities the intent of the law has been challenged through gaps in interpretation which, depending on the town or city, require compliance with additional local regulations and other red tape. This has effectively made providing licensed home-based care, or expanding to group home care prohibitive. The availability of early care and education is increasingly limited, which also limits a parent's ability to work and contribute to the economy.

In the near future 15 million dollars in ARPA construction funding will be available to help our providers grow capacity. This funding will help small business owners fund renovations necessary to provide licensed home early care, or to expand their space to provide for several additional children. This will be especially important for smaller, family home providers who may have a great program, but don't have access to the capital needed to grow their business. It is one way communities can begin to build access to early care, allowing more parents to work .

Accessible childcare is a foundation for a working society. Affordable care, with proximity to transportation and hours that match a parent work schedule are necessary for parents to support their families and contribute to Connecticut's economy. Children are able to learn and grow in a developmentally appropriate setting and parents can work with peace of mind knowing that their children are in a nurturing and safe environment.

Family home care is an important part of the early learning infrastructure, it has historically been the choice of many parents across the state, especially those with infants and toddlers, and it is an option for children needing before and after school care, and/or care during non-traditional hours.³ Passage of this bill is one small measure that can be taken to increase the availability of licensed, affordable early care and education.

³ The Urban Institute reports that 25,900 low-income children in Connecticut have parents who work at least some non-traditional hours [mostly in the early evening]. Family and group child care is the best-positioned solution to this problem.

High-Quality Early Child Care: A Critical Piece of the Workforce Infrastructure: Framing Paper | May 2019, Sarah Savage Federal Reserve Bank of Boston